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Housekeepers' Chats

Tuesday, December 23, 1930.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Inexpensive Holiday Food." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Bulletins available: "Boning Lamb Cuts". Mimeographed leaflet published by the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

My next-door neighbor has lots of good ideas---practical, sensible ideas about running her home, and raising her children, and keeping her husband contented. I know, because we have lived side by side for years and I have watched her work out her ideas right before my eyes. She takes good care of her home and even better care of her family--which, by the way, includes four lively children, a husband and a grandmother. And she does it all on a small income with "the minimum of effort and the maximum of comfort", as the man who wants to sell me a steam yacht would say. (Can you imagine me with a steam yacht at my age?) My neighbor adds to her other virtues by being rarely worried, never nagging and never rushed to death. More than that, she finds time to do lots of interesting things beside running her household and not neglect her job.

So, when my neighbor starts to tell me any of her ideas, I prick up my ears, and listen, because I am sure that though I'M too old to indulge in yachts, I am not yet past the age when I can learn from a good teacher.

When I dropped over to borrow some butter this morning, my neighbor was sitting up on her kitchen stool holding a notebook and pencil and making holiday meal plans. (We had been having waffles at our house and our butter supply ran out just when Uncle Ebenezer was on his last half waffle. It would never do to let the meal end that way when Uncle Ebenezer believes in finishing every morsel on his plate.)

"I am going to take this pat of butter back to Uncle Ebenezer," I said, "And then I'm coming right back to hear about your holiday plans. Maybe you'll have some ideas that I'll want to pass on to my radio friends."

My neighbor smiled. "Be sure to warn them first that my ideas at present are all on thrift. The Simmons family is economizing this year. It's the style, you know."

When I returned my neighbor was still smiling. "It is really fun to plan economies on paper. I'm having a great time just now making low-cost menus."

I drew up a chair and sat down beside her. "Do tell me about them. I shall sit here patiently and hear all the details."

"It all started last night when Kim and I happened to be going over last year's expenses. We were shocked and scandalized when we figured up how much we spent during the holidays just on food alone. We had lots of company, you know, and I bought so many fancy things to serve on every occasion. I covered my table with all the luxuries and dainties. We had all kinds of cakes, expensively prepared nuts and sweetmeats, relishes, expensive cuts of meat, crab and lobster, strawberries and other out-of-season fruits, and the olives we ate amounted almost to bushels. I was entertaining all my rich relatives, you know, and I was trying to put on a little and do it in style. Naturally, lots of food went to waste, because I planned too generously, and much of the rest didn't justify the expense. Shall I tell you my program for this year?"

"Please do."

"We are going to entertain just as much, have just as many guests, and, I hope, just as much fun. But we're not going to overdo the food end of it. Just because Aunt Lily likes chocolate cake and Aunt Rose angel food and the cousins spice cake, it doesn't mean that I must please them all at one sitting, does it, Aunt Sammy? And because one of the uncles enjoys ripe olives ^{and} another green and the rest of us prefer celery, does it follow that I must cater to all three as I did last year? Not I."

I assured her that in my opinion one kind of cake and celery ought to satisfy the right sort of relatives.

"Plain living and high thinking, Aunt Sammy-- that's to be our motto this year, and it is going to apply not only to Christmas dinner, but to teas, buffet suppers, and all the other gay occasions, I'm planning. Gayety and economy combined--that is my idea."

A good one, I thought. I wanted to hear more.

"I was brought up on the ideas that Christmas was not Christmas without a turkey. When I married Jim I learned that he thought Christmas required a duck and New Years a goose. We both hung on to old traditions and forgot the bills. I've changed my mind. For a small family I am sure that chicken, duck or goose is a wiser choice than turkey, because turkeys are large and mean left-overs. But this year I said to myself, why not use a boned roast chockful of our favorite stuffing? Why not use one of the less expensive cuts of meat like pork shoulder or breast of lamb? They make beautiful, delicious stuffed roasts. My butcher is glad to bone a roast for me, if I ask him when he is not too busy with rush orders. Or perhaps this year I'll do it myself from the directions in that useful mimeographed leaflet you gave me. I find that these boney cuts of meat go a long way for the money, if stuffed and roasted, because the stuffing seems to extend the meat flavor."

"Tell me some more - I am interested and I am sure my radio friends will be too. Lots of them are being stylish and economizing this year."

"Guess what I used to sew up my roast after stuffing. A piece of twine? Cord? A thick, strong, curved mattress-needle with a large eye. Mine cost about ten cents at a department store and I have used it for years."

"What vegetables are you using this year? I'd like to hear about those."

"I have been considering that question very carefully. We use lots of vegetables in our family. I learned long ago that it never pays to cut down on them, because our health suffers if we go without them. But I intend to choose the inexpensive ones. Since holiday dinners based on the New England tradition require turnips or rutabagas, onions and mashed potatoes -- all very modest in price - I shall use one or two of those. For color and flavor and to provide vitamins and minerals, there are the leafy vegetables -- spinach, chard, cabbage or lettuce -- or a green vegetable like string beans. Then there are tomatoes, my stand-by. I read the other day that tomatoes were a palatable source of three vitamins. I believe those were the very words used in the article. It went on to say that they compared favorably with leafy green vegetables and retained their vitamin content even when canned. So I intend to use canned tomatoes often. They are inexpensive and so convenient in the winter when fresh vegetables are scarce and usually costly. Next year I shall put up a lot more tomatoes from the garden, so there will be enough to supply the family all the year. There, Aunt Sammy, I've been talking a steady stream. You must be tired of listening."

"Ch, no. You haven't told me about your dessert plans yet."

"And I haven't discussed relishes yet, have I? Well, I'll say this-- I am not going to serve three kind of jelly, pickles, olives, celery and radishes with the main course this year as has been the custom in our family. One jar of homemade sweet relish and one glass of my current jelly is all we need and won't mean a lot of my good preserves barely touched waiting in the refrigerator for me to think of some way to use them up."

"You asked about dessert. Dried fruits, Aunt Sammy, apples and molasses all came to my mind at once as possibilities for wholesome, low-cost desserts. I remember hearing you praise dried fruits as good confections for children. They are not expensive and there are so many of them--raisins, prunes, peaches, apricots, figs and dates. I serve them instead of candy just as they are washed for the children, and I use them in puddings, pies, sauces, stewed fruit dishes and even for salads. There are so many possibilities with them that I don't have to worry

much about variety in my desserts. This Christmas, instead of plum pudding, the Simmons family is going to indulge in suet pudding just filled with raisins."

"What about apples and molasses?"

"I'll feature those two good foods at other meals. Simple, old-fashioned desserts like baked apple and Brown Betty, daintily served with a bit of whipped cream or hard sauce, are not scorned in our house. Neither is hot gingerbread, an old molasses favorite, served with caramel sauce or lemon sauce."

"I'm going home," I told my neighbor, "And write down everything you said before I forget it."

Isn't it lucky I have a neighbor with such good ideas.

Wednesday. "The Children's Christmas."

